

Assessing Young Dual Language Learners: Challenges and Opportunities

Based on Espinosa, (2008), *A Review of the Literature on Assessment Issues for Young English Language Learners*. Paper prepared for the NAS Committee on Developmental Outcomes and Assessments for Young Children

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What, Why & How of Assessment for Young Children Who are Learning Through Two Languages

- Fair, Reliable, and Valid Assessment is Critical to Effective Teaching
- Good Assessment Drives Instructional Decision-Making
- Accurate Assessment May be Even More Important for Young DLL

DLL Children are Different from Monolingual Children

- ◆ Process of Language Acquisition: Simultaneous or Successive/Sequential-- **Need to Know when child was introduced to English**
- ◆ Uneven Development: Depends on Child & Environment Characteristics-- **Need to Know Stage of English Acquisition**
- ◆ Brain Research on Effects of Early Bilingualism-- **Need to Know About Both Languages**

Characteristics of Early Bilingualism

- ◆ Stages of Sequential/Successive Bilingualism
(Tabors & Snow, 1994)
 1. Home Language Use
 2. Non-Verbal/Observational Period
 3. Telegraphic/Formulaic Speech
 4. Productive Language

Young Dual Language Learners are Highly Variable-- Significant Implications for Accurate Assessment

Additional Features of Young DLL Children

- ◆ Degree of Bilingualism: Balanced vs. Unbalanced; Language Dominance (shifts)
- ◆ Context of Development: Family, Community, Exposure, Cultural Values
- ◆ Individual Child: Personality, Risk-Taker, Outgoing, etc.

Fair and Accurate Assessment



- ✓ Reflect and Be Sensitive to Characteristics of Dual Language Learners
- ✓ Capture Overall Language Competence with Attention to L1 and L2

! Goals of Program Need to be
Reflected in Assessment
Methods

and

! Procedures Need to Match
Purpose

Four Broad Purposes for Early Childhood Assessments

(National Educational Goals Panel; Shepard, Kagan, & Wurtz, 1998).

1. To promote learning and development of individual children.
2. To identify children with special needs and health conditions for intervention purposes.
3. To monitor trends in programs and evaluate program effectiveness.
4. To obtain benchmark data for accountability purposes at the local, state and national level.

Purpose

3&4. Program Evaluation
(public, boards, Congress)

2. Identify/Refer
Children who may
need special services

1. Monitor a child's
progress (inform
instruction, feedback
to curriculum, child
and parents)

5/11/2010

Type of Assessment

3&4. Groups - norm or criterion
referenced (annually) (NRS)

2. Individually - Developmental
screening test: norm or
criterion referenced (annually)

1. Mostly informal measures:
observation, checklist,
portfolios, teacher-made tests
(daily)

Purpose 1: Assessment for Instructional Improvement

- ◆ Includes regular and periodic observations of the child in many settings over time
- ◆ Relies primarily on procedures that reflect the ongoing routine of the classroom
- ◆ Avoids placing children in artificial situations or diverting children from their natural learning process

Authentic, Informal, Alternative Assessments

- ◆ Observations, Interviews, Check lists, Language Samples, Work Products, Portfolios, etc.
- ◆ Potential for Bias and Lack of Validity for Dual Language Learners

Head Start Child Outcomes Framework

- ◆ Understands/uses an increasingly complex and varied vocabulary
 - ◆ Do you count L1 and L2? How do you rate code-mixing?
- ◆ Progresses in speaking English
 - ◆ At what rate? How do you know if rate is typical?
- ◆ Identifies at least 10 letters of the alphabet
 - ◆ Which alphabet? Do characters count?

When Observing and Assessing Preschool Children's Acquisition of English....

Adapt Expectations based on Knowledge of
Total Language Environment (SES, Exposure
to English)

&

Learning Opportunities in L1 & L2, Family
Culture & Practices, etc,) and Child.

Goal: Child is progressing toward fluency in understanding English

Stage 1: Understands little or no English; repeats words in home language even when not understood by others; may appear confused or unsure of what to do. May use gestures or body language to respond to questions/directions; may participate non-verbally by following actions of others.

Begins to attend to activities in English when supported in home language

Joins in non-verbal play of classmates. Ex: *classmate asks child to play with blocks and child smiles and walks to dramatic play corner; will watch and follow others' lead in play, classroom transitions, or directions..*

Goal: Child is progressing toward fluency in understanding English

- ◆ Stage 2: Demonstrates understanding of a few English words and phrases for objects (nouns) and actions (verbs); begins to attend to group activities in English, may need physical cues
 - ◆ Often attends to others speaking English
 - ◆ Shows increased participation in group activities and joining in clapping, singing games

Adapted from DRDP PS@2010, California State Department of Education, Child Development Division

Teachers and Assessors Need Guidance of Indicators of Typical Language Development of Dual Language Learners for Instructional Decision-Making

- ◆ Need to know about process of second language development
 - ◆ What it looks like
 - ◆ Rates of Progress
 - ◆ Normal Variations

Language of Assessment

- ◆ Assessment Must Reflect Program & Assessment Goals (*English Acquisition and Home Lang. Development*)
- ◆ How Do You Determine Language Dominance & Assess Home Language Development?

Language Groups

◆ EF-----BF-----SF(HL)

◆ (EF) English Fluent

◆ (BF) Bilingual Fluent

◆ (SF) Home Language Fluent

Language Dominance

- ♦ Interview **parents** about early language environment (75% accurate)
 - ♦ Spanish-only or English-only: pretty stable, but some cross-over
 - ♦ Children in Mixed language homes need some kind of language screening procedure (Ex: LAUPCOS multi-step routing protocol, i.e., family info, Pre-LAS(2 subtests), ROWPVT)
 - ♦ Teacher reports not as reliable (FACES)

Language of Assessment

- ◆ Initially determine what child knows in home language--how much of curriculum has child mastered in any language?
- ◆ Determine level of English proficiency
- ◆ Monitor progress of English acquisition and overall development

Assessment for Identification of Special Needs: Screening, Referral & Diagnosis

- ◆ Standardized Screening and Assessment Instruments and Procedures Are Often Administered

Standardized Screening, Readiness, and Diagnostic Measures

- ◆ **Issues for Young Children Who are Dual Language Learners:**
 - ◆ Literal Translations----NO
 - ◆ Developmental Screeners: Accuracy of Predictive Ability (*Specificity & Sensitivity*)
 - ◆ Norming Sample (monolingual? *SES, Dialect*)
 - ◆ Psychometric Properties (Reliability & Validity)
 - ◆ Cultural Sensitivity

The Challenge

- ✓ Diagnostic decisions about bilingual children should be based on current views of bilingualism
- ✓ Normative Data about Development of Dual language Learners is Not Plentiful
- ✓ High Degree of Variability That is Normal; DLL Children May Look Delayed in Both Languages Because of Weak Language Exposure, but Eventually Catch Up

Assessment Considerations for DLL Child

- ◆ Child May be Unresponsive or Uncooperative in English Assessment Situations; Child May Know Concept, Vocabulary, or Skill, but not Understand Demands of Assessment
- ◆ Need to Distinguish Between *Language Difference* Due to Dual Language Status and *Language Delay or Disorder*

Assessment Challenges

If children are assessed in a language they do not fully use or comprehend or with invalid measures, their language skills will be underestimated (Pre-LAS)

Invalid measures of language will result in over-referral of typical language learners or under-referral of at-risk children

Purpose for Assessment	Type of Measure/Procedure Recommended
Determination of Language Dominance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Parent/Family Survey with questions about language usage, interaction patterns, and language proficiency ➤ Teacher observation of language usage across multiple contexts ➤ Possibly English language screener ➤ Assessment team that answers following for each EL child: which language does the child have the most experience with, use more fluidly, and most often prefers to use (Genesee et al., 2004)?
Language Proficiency 5/11/2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Language samples across multiple settings (in small groups, with peers, with family members, etc.) ➤ Standardized language narratives (e.g., Renfrew Bus Story) ➤ Standardized language measures of receptive and productive capacity used cautiously (e.g., preLAS English and Spanish; ROWVT and EOWVT; Pre-IPT; and/or Woodcock-Muñoz); at certain stages of English language development DLLs will know fewer vocabulary words in each language which is typical—not a language delay) ➤ Teacher ratings/observations

Purpose for Assessment	Type of Measure/Procedure Recommended
Determination of Language Learning Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Collect information in both languages (especially child's dominant language; delays will show up in both languages) ➤ Use appropriate standardized tests of language abilities cautiously ➤ Collaborate with native language speakers ➤ Observe language usage across multiple settings, in and out of school ➤ Team members make best professional judgment and update frequently
Language Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Informal assessments aligned with curriculum goals in language of instruction (focused teacher-child language interactions) ➤ Observational language assessment of ELD with guidance ➤ Curriculum embedded assessments in English and home language if dual language program

Early Learning Standards and Dual Language Learners

- ◆ Few (2) states address unique needs of dual language learners
- ◆ Standards are leading to K Readiness Testing
 - ◆ The K screening measures I have reviewed have not been designed or adapted with considerations for DLLs--mostly English-only,
Can result in non-non labeling
 - ◆ California's standards address development, curriculum & assessment for DLLs--most others don't

Recommendations

- ✓ Great caution must be used when administering standardized tests to young DLLs. They must be culturally validated and normed on a population that represents the children being tested. Few screening and assessment instruments have been translated into other languages and renormed for the new DLL population (Espinosa, 2008).

Recommendations for Policy

- ◆ Ensure assessment policies incorporate knowledge of dual language development, not just proficiency in English
- ◆ Strong recommendation that all assessment instruments used for K Readiness, screening, or evaluation purposes be valid for DLLs

Recommendations for Policy

- ◆ Make training funds available to early childhood programs to provide professional development on dual language development
- ◆ Fund the development of new measurement tools that accurately capture language development and classroom quality for DLLs

Recommendations for Policy

- ◆ Carefully review all federal statements of learning expectations for appropriateness for DLLs e.g., Head Start Child Outcomes Framework, National Early Learning Standards
 - ◆ Possibly provide guidance to states on how to address learning needs of DLLs

Final Thoughts

- ◆ National statement about first and second language development for young children and how to promote language development goals would provide much needed direction for states.

Conclusion

Assessment can be a powerful lever for improved instruction for young dual language learners.... If

it is balanced, fair, and based on current knowledge

Thank you for this opportunity!!